It was Cory's turn. He'd been with the BlackHawks awhile. But only showed up when I could. Cory had climbed many times before. No problem. Up he went, a man with experience. All of us looked up. He was just about at the top. He reached for the last bar, while looking down, slipped, falling into the pile of rocks and glass. We watched with eyes so open, that if they were any wider , they'd have fallen out. At the opening of the silo, we stood dazed. Cory shattered his body, landing on the glass. Blood everywhere. His jaw a total mess. We all ran looking for someone to call the police and ambulance.

The silo became swarmed with curious people. Each talking to the other with arms crossed. Cory was taken quickly. The rest of us walked up Tacoma Street silently. And found the comfort of the tree. Lying on our back the tears. Jake started a story, trying to keep our minds off Cory. We listened and looked occasionally at one another. The rest of the day and part of the night was spent doing nothing at all.We just layed under the tree to think and think.

School tomorrow. The weekend had gone by nice and slow. Do I have any clean clothes? We had our usual fight at home before going to bed. The King and Rodent going at it eventually enlisting me into it. Would they ever stop hitting? I fell asleep crying. It was morning now. I was awakened by someone starting their car. Rodent had already been up. He was looking out the bathroom window. I looked too. It was Mrs. Wilkins son. He'd come to pick her up again as he usually did, once a week.

The other kids were gathering outside. Rodent and I hurried downstairs. The King was sucking down some cereal. I glanced at the empty quart of milk. "Come on George" Mrs. Wilkins is going to leave. The The King held the bowl in his hands and inhaled the last of the milk. Rodent caught his attention now. Every kid outside stood there waiting. Out she came in full authority. Each step a wonder. Her son walked ahead to open the car door. Mrs. Wilkins stopped at the car and turned to us. She started swinging her purse over her head. Not a kid moved.

Scott started a drum roll with his lips. She bent down and slowly sat on the rear seat. The whole place was always amazed to seethe car's front end raised high about the road. Mrs. Wilkins weighed in at about four hundred pounds. Big. What a show.Her son never said a thing. When she was home she insisted on peace and quiet. But the Rendash's lived next door. Every day was a battle in the house. All of us getting into fights and raising hell. Privately I wanted what Mrs. Wilkins wanted. But that was just a dream. Mrs. Wilkins banged on the kitchen wall with two large spoons. When she wanted us to stop. We stopped alright, but began again over and over. She came across as a strict disciplinarian. She was kind to us. She was Black, but Indian. I'd ventured into her apartment a few times. Hoping she'd break out some cookies, and pour me a glass of milk.

Naturally, I did this when the others weren't around. She understood my mothers position. Seven children and no man. A typical project family. I thought that 57 Chevy's were popular. But getting a divorce overshadowed that.

None of the BlackHawks had fathers living at home. Some were dead, others walked out their doors and never returned. My father walked. We watched Mrs. Wilkins son drive away. The car totally off balanced and squeaking. I went back inside the house with my brothers. I grabbed my coat and headed to Carlo's. We met everyday as usual. Watching the sky and feeling the coming of fall.

By now we all were past our initiation stage. We'd become veteran shoplifters. Storing food down my cellar. Cory got out of the hospital with scars all over him. It was a miracle he lived. Now October had arrived. Jake and Scott were sitting at the desk making a drawing on a piece of paper. Craig stood up placing a leg on his seat. Resting his elbow on his knee. He started telling us his plans for a log cabin. It had to be built before the snow came. Look, he said. We got Rabbi's cellar, this cellar. Grub's Market and a few other places to hang out. It's going to be different this year. We're going to have a private winter home, just for us guys. Nobody but BlackHawks. "And I mean it"!

The plans must have been in his mind quite awhile. Jake, Scott and Craig each had a seperate list of tools and materials we were going to need. Craig eyed Carlo. Carlo!, do you think you could come up with a couple more hammers? Carlo nodded and told him that Spag's had plenty. No problem. How many nails? I could get as many as we need. He bragged. Jake told Carlo to take the Rodent with him and grab a few hatchets. Rodent looked up and smiled. Scott took the floor. "Oh great one" he said looking at the King. You, Rabbi, Jake and I will get the plywood. There's some construction going on up Clark Street. They're building some new houses. There is plenty of free wood.Criag's going to pick out the spot, where we'll build the cabin. "Keep your eyes out for some furniture". Remember, tell no one. "Look, we'll discuss this further after school. We'll all meet by the flood controls on Tacoma Street. Don't forget!. Off we went. Pushing and racing toward the swamp. Winter wasn't far away. The fog lifted from the water.

Reminding me of a horror movie. The Bullfrogs croaked loudly. Watching as we walked along the edge. Carlo grabbed one and began squeezing it. Lucky frog. He'd been so slimy. He slipped out of Carlo's hand. Escaping back in the water, swimming away from reach. I'll get you tomorrow! Then your mother yelled Carlo. He picked up a handful of pebbles and whipped them towards the frog's direction. The frog was safe for now. We walked over to the tree, where we'd hung some frogs before.

I thought about my father. Jake wanted to show us something before the bell rang. He led us to a group of trees, about twenty yards from where we were. We formed a circle. Jake pointed to a tree in front of us. He began explaining why there were ropes tied around it. Now don't get scared, just listen.

Not long ago, a girl came by here when it was getting dark. She'd always been told not too. Anyway, her friends told her to meet them in this spot. When she arrived, nobody was here. It was dark now and she started getting nervous. Not long after, she heard some movement nearby. Leaves crackled and some branches snapped. The tears started coming. She called out, Who's out there? There was no reply. She leaned tightly against the tree. Breathing heavily. All of a sudden the noises got louder. Closer than she hoped. From out of the darkness came a pair of arms, reaching at her throat. Two more arms! And two more. One of them had some rope. Clothes line rope. They began tieing her to the tree. One of them stuffed a rag in her mouth. She was struggling despartly. One of the strangers ripped open her shirt and tore her bra. Grabbing at her breasts. Feeling them wildly. The other unbuttoned her pants and pulled them down. She now had only her underpants on.

They tried kissing her on the neck, holding her head tightly. If only she could scream. They tore her clothes apart, piece by piece. Suddenly it was over. They were gone. Terrified and crying she didn't movr or make a sound. She was left here all night. The next morning some kids found her and untied the ropes. Someone gave her their coat. She ran home and was never seen again. Don't let your sisters walk around here at night. Or it will happen to them. We stood there focused on the rope. Scott yelled, there's the bell. We all trampled up the hill towards the school. Jake's story was in my mind all morning. Nobody's gonna get my sister's! Carlo looked up at me and smiled. The teacher was watching. "benny, could you write some arithmetric problems for us on the blackboard? I gulped. Standing in front of the class was not my idea of spending the next twenty minutes before recess.

After a few mistakes, I completed my time at the board. "You may sit down Benjamin", Thank you. "yes ma,m. Time for recess children, exclaimed Miss Adella. We all lined up. Then spread out after flying thru the door. I was walking towards the jungle gym. When my eyes zoomed in on Jake waving at me, by the bicycle stands. I read his lips. Come here! come here!. He looked as though he'd just come from Italy. He held inside the mighty pride of the Italians. Jake Buffone and his brother Carlo. I'd watch Jake many times, staring at his brother. Knowing he would die for him at any given moment.

Jake was a leader. Built out of steel. Like Carlo, he was incredibly strong. Two muscle beachers. Jake had powerful hands. His ultimate weapon of defence. He could choke you to a point of unconsciousness, in half a minute. The claws of the BlackHawks.

What Jake? I said as he reached behind to his back pocket. Pulling out what I thought was a piece of paper. He placed it in front of his face with the picture towards him. "What is it! What is it! I questioned. Jake kept smiling. Rabbi, your going to like this. He replied. Reaching his arm around me, he showed me the picture. My heart pounding loudly. It was Miss Adella, my teacher. In her slip. I started sweating. Jake and the gang knewI loved her. Where did you get it? I asked. From her purse, where do you think? How I asked? She left it in her car this morning, when she arrived. I just happened to walk by the car and spotted it. She never locks her door. I opened the door, grabbed inside the purse. Gripping a couple of bucks and this picture. She looks nice don't she? he gleamed. You can have it Rabbi. Really! I said. Sure, go ahead, take it. I put it in my shirt pocket close to my heart..

Jake and I started walking towards Rodent and Carlo. They were spinning on the merry-go- round. Carlo was laughing like crazy. Rodent fell off, rolling away from the merry-go-round. Jake helped him up. Where's his Highness? asked Jake. Don't know, replied the Rodent. Jake looked around. He wasn't in sight. The bell rang. We all went back inside. After quieting the class, Miss Adella told us to sit at our desks. Make something special out of the leaves, she'd collected during recess. Suddenly I remembered her picture. I reached out for it carefully, pulled it out and stared. I could feel myself drooling. I wiped my chin. I was lost in thoughts. The picture was getting wet from the sweat of my hands.

Raising my head, I noticed Miss Adella looking at me. Her eyes fell to the picture in my hand. She stood up keeping her eyes on me. I didn't know what to do. I lifted my desk top placing the photo inside. She came upto my desk, bent down, and whispered in my ear. "What did you have in your hand?" I replied. She put an arm around me and brought me closer to her. "Come on ben, you can show me. You won't get mad will you Miss Adella? I said. No, of course not. She replied. Are you sure? I'm sure, she said. While squeezing my shoulder softly. Alright I said. I lifted the top of the desk slowly. Reached in and grabbed the picture. Carlo didn't know I had it. Nobody did. Except Jake. I saw some of my class mates looking up. Out of the corner of my eye. I handed her the picture, expecting the worst. She stood up dropping her jaw. I'd like to see you after school Benjamin. Just stay in your seat after the bell rings. She said nervously. Yes Miss Adella, I replied.

Carlo looked over. What was that Rabbi? I whispered, later, later. The last bell rang. Everyone began to line up in the corridor. Except me. Carlo waved to me to get in line. I can't, I can't I said while Miss Adella went out of the room, to see them off.

She turned around for a moment, looking inside at me. Be back ina minute, Ben. It seemed like hours. She walked in and sat on top of her desk. Now Ben, Where did you get that picture? How could i lie to her. She was the prettiest women I've ever seen. Next to my Ma. I thought about Jake. He'd bury me if I told her exactly what happened. Well? she said. I looked up. Most of the time I kept my head down, while speaking to her. Her eyes penetrated mine. Miss Adella, you probably won't believe me, I found it at recess. It was by the bicycle stands on the ground. I picked it up and didn't even look at your slip. She smiled. My heart throbbed loudly. Did you show it to anyone? No ma'm, I said What were you going to do with it? she asked. I was going to give it to the principal. Why not me? she said. Because i was afraid you wouldn't like me if you knew I'd seen the picture. It's alright Ben. I'm not angry. I'll just pit it away now. okay? Yes Ma'm. She called me to the desk and hugged me. Kissed my cheek. I wanted to marry her right then and there. Come on Ben, I'll give you a ride home. She said as she moved to the coat rack. Reaching for her coat. Oh, that's ok Miss Adella, I'll walk. I always do. No no Ben, all the others have left. I don't want you walking home alone. I just knew the Black-Hawks were outside, waiting in the brush. I got up and walked towards the door. She held my hand walking out the front door. There they were.

Lying down between the bushes by the bicycle stand. Miss Adella hadn't seen them as far as I knew. Oh, before we go Ben, could you show me where you found my picture? I pointed to the right of the bicycle stand. Over there? she asked. Yes Ma'm. Right there. Was there anything else there? No Ma'm, just the picture. Are you sure? yes. Just then Carlo stood up from the bushes. Ben! Ben! are you coming? Miss Adella saw Carlo standing there. She knew we were best friends. Ben you may go with Carlo, but do be careful. Thank You Ma'm. See you tomorrow. Bye. I ran to Carlo almost tripping over myself. What were you doing with Miss Adella? he asked curiously. Oh nothing Carlo. She just wanted to ask me where I lived. It took you long enough to tell her. replied Carlo. Well you know. I like her. We like eachother.

Actually I was becoming the teachers pet. Loving every second of it. Carlo and the rest of us headed for the flood controls. A couple kids didn't show up, making Craig angry. Fuck them! he said angrily. We'll do what we planned. Carlo, it's still early. You and Rabbi go down to Spag's and get the hammers and hatchets. No wait, you and Rodent, said Jake. The rest of us know what to do. By the time you to get back, we'll be able to go up to Clark Street and get the wood. We have to wait until dark. Jake headed home because his mother said they were having pizza for supper. He loved pizza. We all did. And he wouldn't miss it unless there was a chance of making money first. The rest of us followed Craig and Scott up to the woods between St. Nick Ave. and Clark Street.

There was thousands of trees everywhere. Perfect for building a cabin. Craig said. We trampled through the woods until we reached the spot Craig and Scott liked most. They wanted an area where the trees would make a square. No problem.

Except there were trees that needed to be cut down, in the middle of the square. Scott measured with his feet. Great! he said. While Scott plotted the area, Craig had climbed up one of the trees. They were thin. Very straight. Most of them stood at least thirty feet tall. Some Birch too. I liked Birch trees. Somebody once told me the Indians made canoes out of them. I loved Indians too. They liked the woods and loved being free to roam. The white man changed that. Not me. The other guys who lived before me. Craig was almost at the top. He paused for a moment, adjusting his hands and feet. We watched while he shifted his weight. To one side, causing the tree to bend. This was new, like most of the things I'd been learning.

Scott called it "Boomerranging". It looked like so much fun. The rest of us found our own trees to Boomer-rang. Cr..g bent over so much his feet nearly touched the ground. He hung there for a few seconds. Boom! he let go catapulting the tree away from him. The woods echoed. All of us climbed high. e climbed up, and bent the trees over with our weight. Up and down, up and down, until it was almost dark. Scott stopped a mo-ment before leaving the woods. Okay, we gotta go to Carlo's cellar and meet Jake, Carlo and Rodent. When we got there, Jake was chewing some gum. He had brought down a half a pizza for us to eat. Everyone leaped at it to get their share. As usual I wasn't quick enough. Jake grabbed a piece from Cory and split it in half. Fere Rabbi, eat it. Two bites later I was still hungry. I thought about those lobsters the Rodent had stolen for my mother. They were good. She had boiled them up and gave us all a piece of it.

Mmmm, all that melted butter. The pizza was good too. Jake's Uncle owned a pizza shop in Shrewsbury. Near Lake Quinsigamond. He worked for him sometimes on weekends. Jake was often to busy with BlackHawk business. Sometimes Carlo would work too. Almost always they'd bring something home for their family. Whatever was left over was ours. There was food in my cellar, but that had to wait. We were just sitting there listening to O.R.C. on the radio when Rodent and Carlo finally returned from Spag's. The cellar door swung open. In came Carlo and Rodent. It went silent. Well, how'd you do, you guys? asked Craig. Carlo smiled. The Rodent tried grabbing a piece of pizza from the King's lips. Bam! crash! slam! They were on the floor beating the hell out of each other.

Jake grabbed Rodent and through him against the wall. His Highness got up and went after the Rodent, with blood coming out of his nose. Bam!, Blam! Bam! Crazy bastards wouldn't stop. All of us joined in and held them both until Jake decided they we're calmed down enough to listen to him. You assholes, what are you doing? Look it, you got blood all over the floor and you broke two chairs. Get a rag Rabbi, Jake said angrily. Sure, okay. I said as I moved away from the Rodent. Clean it up ordered Jake to Rodent. Why should I? it's the King's blood.

Just do it yelled Jake. Rodent grit his teeth and began wiping up the mess. His Highness, still was being held by Carlo and Craig. Let go of me! he yelled as the veins in his neck almost poppe[illegible]. I'll kill that fuck'in Rat. [illegible]odent lifted his head. He looked at the King with tombstones in his eyes. The King broke loose. Bam, crash, slam! Blam! The place was a mess. His Highness ended up top of Rodent. Swinging merciless at his head. Alright, alright, cried out the Rodent. Get the fuck off of me! You even make a move and I'll bash your head in! Screamed the King. His Highness got up and walked over by the cellar door. Blam! he pounded the door with his fist. The King knew that Rodent was not far behind him. When it came to defense. But the King always conquered. This was one of the few times they hadn't taken out their frustrations on me.

What a relief. Rodent stood there a minute recovering from the battle. He opened his coat and pulled three hatchets from inside his pants. Everyone's eyes popped open wide. It's a miracle, Rodent didn't get hurt. Having them in his pANTS. The King started pacing. He'd hadn't noticed what the Rodent just did. His Highness came to the office and stood there stunned. Rodent had the hatchets gripped tightly. Jake moved fast. Give me them before you do something stupid. The King and Rodent stared eachother down. Both of you stay clear of eachother replied Jake. It went silent. Craig turned from the desk. Hey! we gonna get that wood or what? It's getting late. We all stood up waiting for the Hamptons to move. the buffone's walked toward the cellar door and up the stairs. The rest followed.

It was pitch dark now. Jake and Carlo went into the house to get a couple of flashlights. I feared the darkness. That ole Boogie Man was out there. He wasn't gonna get me, I thought. The Buffone's came out shining the flashlights into the windows of the apartments next door. Someone opened the door. We scattered. A minute later, behind the boiler building we counted heads. Nobody was missing. Rodent faced the wall and started taking a leak. Scott and Carlo, directed the light towards the chimney. Towering next to the boiler.

Their eyes following the light from top to bottom. Are you done? questioned Craig. Yeah, yeah, replied Rodent. Cory eyed a skunk. Not now, said Jake. We got alot of work to do. Come on. The moon hid behind the clouds. It was cool. October sent chills throughout our bodies. Everyone zipped their coats shivering. Carlo and Jake began wallsing through the alleys. Toward the intersection of Constitution and Tacoma Streets.

The flood controls were in sight. It made me angry that we had to go through the woods with only two flashlights. Maybe I could get one up WoolWorth's. The next time we go to Lincoln Plaza. Craig gave us our orders. All we were going to do is take some two-by-fours. Some plywood and anything else that might have proved useful. The woods were very dark. It was a short cut. Why go to the big hill at Clark Street. When we could cut through the woods without being seen. Getting wacked over and over by small

branches was painful.

Rodent was in front of me. We stayed close. Everytime Rodent came upon some thin branches sticking out, blocking the way. He'd push them forward and letting them whip back hitting me. I felt like jumping on him. How he could irritate. I'd had enough. I moved ahead of him. Carlo now was in front of me. He had a flashlight. Now it was so much easier going thru the woods. At the top of the hill, on St. Nick Ave. was the contruction site. Silently approaching the site, Jake pointed to the piles of wood next to the framed house. Sh h h h! he said. Whispering, Jake told us not to speak. Go to the plywood Carlo, King. Carry it slowly. Rodent, Cory, both of you get a piece too. Rabbi, Scott, Craig and I will search for more nails and tools. We'll get the two by fours too. Like Birds of the night, we scooped everything up with speed and accuracy.

I spotted a box of nails. Setting between the piles of two by fours. Just saying take me, take me. I did. It was awfully heavy. I hoped Jake wanted some spikes. I noticed the other guys struggling with the wood. It was our luck that lessened the possiblities of being seen. The area was dimly light. The house that was being built, stood next to the woods. It had a small back yard. The woods spread throughout the entire hill. Jake carried a couple two by fours and a flashlight. Going back to the spot where we were going to build the cabin, was difficult. It was so dark we didn't know the exact spot to put the wood.

Jake decided to put everything down. Craig said, we'll come back tomorrow and put it where it should go. I felt relieved that this was it for the night. My back hurt from the nails I carried. We found our way out quickly. There it was Sin Valley! Brightened slightly by the street lights. It was never well lit. Many lights had been broken by some kids who hurled rocks at them. I hadn't broken any yet. Jake and I had a stick in our hands. Pretending to be sword fighting, in the middle of Tacoma Street. I thought about Rodney Street and my father.

I decided to throw the stick away, and caught up to Scott. Craig yelled to a man on the sidewalk "What time is it? Yhe man looked at his watch. He shouted back. Ten Thirty! It was pretty late. I'm going home said Scott. Me too replied Jake. Alright, see you guys tomorrow. replied Jake. For the next three weeks we kept going to the construction site gathering materials. Some days were skipped allowing us to go to Lincoln Plaza. We'd gotten a couple more wallets from White's, Friday evening. Carlo was look out this time. I thought sure someone would walk in on us. It went perfect. Carlo was a good teacher. These people couldn't have been very smart. After all, we'd taken from here before. As long as things remained this way. We'd come back and take some more.

Since the next day was Saturday. We met at Carlo's cellar and made plans to go downtown. My first time walking in the city. Worcester, Massachusetts, U.S.A. We'd taken Lincoln Street all the way. Lincoln Square provided some amusement. Street people flocked that area. In the middle of the square stood a very tall flagstaff. The flag was waving in perfect motion. Red, white and blue. I knew those colors well. I pledged allegence, to the flag. . . . . .

Jake and his Highness must have been reading my mind. Standing next to the flag pole, they both held there hands on their hearts. Raising the other while looking up. They began singing their version of the National Anthem.

My country tis of thee
Sweet land of Germany
and Italy
Land where our Fathers Suck
"cause they don't give a fuck
We never care about a thing
of thee we sing

We laughed, chasing each other up and over the monument. The boy's stood next to the square. Jake told us he'd been there. It was nice. Craig crossed over to Main Street. We stayed close together. This was no-mans land. Blackhawks territory ended at Ralph's Market on Lincoln Street.

Jake paused a moment. Pointing at some words on the building in front of us. What does that first word mean? asked his Highness. I don't know replied Jake. "O-b-i-e- d-i-e-n-c-e to law is liberty". Craig said that it was the courthouse. It must mean, they will punish you if you do bad things. We all kept staring at it saying it over and over again. It didn't connect. Craig and the others began walking down Main. Where we going? asked Rodent. To the movies yelled Jake. Who was up ahead carrying Carlo piggy back. People everywhere. The pidgens flew over in a flock. We passed Mechanics Hall and window watched Barnards for a minute.

Jake led us to the Common. Old people sat motionless on the benches. Staring at the sky. I could only guess what was going thru there minds. I looked over at an old man kneeling by a grave. He looked sad. I thought about what he was doing there. On my mind I found these words.

A Long Time Together

All my friends have gone away - and
my fifth dog is at my feet
We both need the cooling shade - cause
we just can't take the heat

My wife and I still talk alot - but
it's me who say's good-bye
I straighten out the flowers there
only God and I know why

A long time together
will only bring you close
A life time - forever
is what I wanted most

I sit here sometimes crying
cause there's nothing more to do
You see all I'm doing is dying
cause without her I'm all through

And my friends have gone away - and
My fifth dog is at my feet
We both need the cooling shade
cause we just can't take the heat

The man suddenly stood up. He glanced at me. He started walking towards the monument. Away from view. I felt strange. Coming out of my thoughts, I was pulled by Carlo to get moving. We walked towards the theatre. Jake passed some money to Craig.. He told him to go into the theatre. When you get inside, open the exit doors for the rest of us. Don't open them, until the place goes dark.

We waited at the side exits. Craig finally it up. We were in and seated, faster than imaginable. Jake loved the balcony. We followed. Nobody was allowed up there for some reason. The usher came up and asked us what we were doing up there. He asked us where our ticket stubs were. What's the matter? said Jake. We haven't done anything. We're just sitting here watching the cartoon. Let's see your stubs, you little punks! The usher boiled. The rest of us sat there not moving. Come on! Let's go, You little hoods didn't pay to get in, did you? His flashlight shining on our faces. We did too!

Roscoe, (Jake's alias for Scott) where's the stubs? Let me see replied Scott. Oh shit! I must have lost them.Sure, sure said the usher. The usher started towards Jake. Come on, punk out! He grabbed Jake, by his shirt. Jake pulled him into the seat. He started hitting him. All hell broke loose. Jake punched him one more time, and crawled across the isle. We followed. Twenty seconds later we were out the door. Come on, Let's get out of here! yelled Jake.

We ran across the common towards Front Street. Jake rubbed his hand while walking fast towards Exchange Street. Up Exchange onto Main. We kept looking back. Nothing. Carlo pointed to the tunnel. Which went below Lincoln Square. O.K. split up. Have of us will go thru the tunnel. The other half across the square to Lincoln Street. We'll meet at Ralph's Market. The tunnel was built so that vehicle traffic could pass under the square, avoiding the rotary above. Pedestrians "keep out" the sign read at the entrance. To us it was a bomb shelter. This is where the BlackHawks would come if the Russians attacked us. We were ready. Jake, Cory, Rodent and I went the tunnel route. His Highness, Carlo, Craig and Shawn went the high road.

Jake and Scott wasted no time starting a song. The echo made us sound like we were many. Carlo should have come the tunnel route. He loved music. The world did. Jake began singing the "Marine Corps Hymn" His version was his version.

Incredible. He even marched like a Marine. I thought of Carlo. Marine this, Marine that. Carlo wanted to be a Marine someday. "Kill the enemy" you know. Whenever we played soldier, he was Audie Murphy. A good guy. Rodent had found a couple soda cans, at the entrance of the tunnel. He was our drummer. He kept the beat going. Some man drove by us shouting Get Out! We flipped him the finger. A commom American jesture. Sufficient. Then we ran the rest of the way out of the tunnel.Air at last! said Scott. The rest of the boys met us outside Ralph's. A couple of you guys go in and get us something to chew on. said Jake. Rodent, Shawn, don't take too long. They went in and were out in three minutes.

Rodent had gone to the snack food isle. He put a large bag of chips inside his coat. Rodent and Shawn went up to the cashier. They asked her if she would change a dollar bill. She did and out they came. Rodent ripped open the bag. Eight hands were sucked in by the smell of the potatoe chips. They were gone. A handful each. The rest was history. Lincoln Plaza seemed many miles away. In fact, it was only about two miles from Ralph's. We ran most of the way. Jumping over eachother and every fire hydrant along the way.

We divided into two groups upon arriving at the Plaza. We knew what to do. It seemed as though everyone was watching us. We couldn't get a thing. As Carlo and I were leavingFirst National, we accidently ran into a women's shopping cart. She raised her fist in anger. What are you kids doing? Where's your mother? Where are you from? The women stared at our bodies. "Look at those rags"! You must be from the project. Get out of here you little balls of filth! Carlo and I stared with puzzled eyes. H u m m m m , she must of heard about the BlackHawks "replied Carlo. The others with us came crashing out the door. The women stood furious. We ran and laughed, cutting across the parking lot.

In and out of parked cars. Sometimes finding a large opening. Shawn was gifted. His legs were definitly God's patent. No BlackHawk flew like Shawn. After a short running start he could leap over the hoods of cars without touching. None of us even tried. Shawn was nine. He and his brother Brian had been BlackHawks even before the Rendash's came.

Shawn was a women's man. All the girls liked him. He and Brian were two of seventeen children. Most families were this large, or a little less. Kids everywhere. Over three thousands living at the zoo. Shawn and Brian were close. Very few Black families lived there at this time.

Shawn and his brother lived on Tacoma Street near Craig and Scott. The only two Black BlackHawks. Shawn and Brian did what they wanted to when they were with us. But when home, it was so different. Their Ma took no lip and judgement came swift. So did the punishments. Belts, sticks, fists, legs and the mighty rolling pin. There weren't any BlackHawk who escaped the tools of discipline. Beat or be Beaten. It was a common practice. If they only knew.

Remember

If you could remember
that you were once small
than it would be easy
not to hurt them at all

Just think about your childhood
and all that you did
Just think about what happened
when you were a kid

I look around and see it
on faces everywhere
it's hard but I believe it
some people just don't care

A child is never guilty
of any wrong they do
cause it's just curiosity
and that ain't nothing new

So if you could just remember
that you were once small
then it would be so easy
not to hurt them at all

The other guys had no luck either. They came out of Woolworth's and Sam's without a thing. We waited awhile sitting on the wall at Lincoln Street School. There it was again "God Must Be First Served" The church. St. Joan Of Arc. We all watched as a priest peeked out the chapel door.

He looked to the left, then to the right. Our eyes connected. He waved. We all waved back while cars passed drowning out all sounds. His Highness made the sign of the cross. Laughing as we headed up the dirt road. Towards G.B.V. It rained hard that night. The cold and the rain didn't mix with us.

Craig and Jake decided to spend the evening coming up with more plans for the log cabin. It was too wet to go off and get some more wood. Jake and Craig were builders. Juvenile Engineers. If we weren't out in the streets shoplifting. We'd be building something. Jake or Craig had decided to put together. Looking at the dirty magazines, Carlo had grabbed weeks ago. Kept our minds in the gutter for most of the evening. There was conversations about girls and what boys do to them. Everyone had their own thoughts concerning woman. I could only guess what the hell they were talking about. Boobs this, snatch that.

For each plan Jake or Craig came up with there was always another for a back up. If plan A didn't work out, we could always look forward to plan B. Eyes were open wide. As each of us felt through the naked pictures. Carlo stood up adjusting the lump in his pants. Rodent knawed at his nails while drooling on every other page.

Craig, His Highness and Jake passed their books back and forth. Making sure they didn't miss a shot. It was time to go home. Jake locked up the cellar and His Highness made the motion for Rodent and I to get going. The King went to our cellar and brought up some candy bars. My mother was eating peanut butter crackers, when we walked in. Where you boy's coming from? She said as she puffed a Pall Mall. Carlo's! replied His Highness. What were you doing that was so interesting at this time of noght? She said curiously. Reading Ma, Reading. Jake was more interested in chomping down the bars of chocolate. Before going to bed, I walked by my mother's room. We were never allowed in there. Only when she wasn't around did we sneak in. She'd been so immaculate about house cleaning. Keeping things in order, we didn't dare touch anything on her dresser.

She could tell if anyone had even been near it. His Highness was the same way. He'd even stolen his own tube of toothpaste. So he didn't have to use the one that was squeezed from the center. Like a Pack Rat, he'd hide all his personal belongings, from the rest of us.

Don't touch this, don't touch that. Or His Majestry would beat you so you'd learn quicker. My mother sat there crying softly. She raised her head and looked at me. Her eyes looked as though she had gotten hit by my father again. Her face was drenched in tears. I never knew what to say. I just waved quickly and went to the bedroom. I cried myself to sleep. Thinking about my mother. Why was she crying? Why did she always have to cry? Was it me? Something I did? She would never say. And the rest of the kids never said anything either. I hated that crowded bed. Always had three or four kids in it. Pulling the covers, kicking me in the face. Tossing and turning endlessly. The only way anyone got any sleep, was by being totally exhausted.

Like my mother. Where did she get her strength, to take care of seven small children? Always tugging and pulling, trying to get our share of her. The next day I woke up on the wrong side of the bed. Nothing unusual. I knew there wasn't anything to eat for breakfast.

The Milkman would come three times a week, and that still wasn't enough. His Highness, got out of bed and splashed some water in his eyes. Rodent turned over closing his eyes tightly, as he smelled his own breath. Using a couple of t-shirts for a pillow didn't help matters. My arms cushioned my head. We didn't have to worry about making the bed. It was a waste of time. We only had one sheet. We slept in our clothes. It was warmer that way.

I looked outside. The sun was shining. The windows were a bit fogged up. You didn't have to step out to feel the cold. It was always too hot or too cold. In the projects apartments. Steam heat from the boiler buildings weren't very reliable. The wonderful folks in management controlled the heat. His Highness wasn't very pleased after seeing the refrigerator empty. We yelled good-bye to my mother, and ran out the door.

Maybe Jake stole some coffee from his mother, said the king. I hope so replied Rodent. I mumbled me too! walking down to New Vista Lane. Jake and the boy's were in Carlo's cellar sipping coffee and eating some Italian toast. It was always Italian. Anything the Buffone's did had to have a connection with Italy. Most of the food they ate was Italian. Carlo sometimes bragged about his connections in the Mafia. Just mention the name and stories would pour out of his mouth. If anything had happened to the Black-Hawks, the Mafia would take care of the people responsible. This was a goal of Carlo's. To be like them.

Nobody stepping on you. If they did they'd die! He considered himself a Lieutenent. In charge of Shoplifting and cracking heads. We each had a place. Sunday morning. Craig and Scott thought about our plans. Before the Rendash's were going to do anything, we had to stop at home for a minute to get the envelopes for church.

In and out in a flash. Even my mother was caught off guard. My sisters went to church with us. BlackHawks don't go to church with girls. Ever! Bev and Erica seemed like ghosts to me. Appearing every now and then. My brothers and I never did pay much attention to their world.

We headed for Grub's. Carlo just loved driving him nuts. It's a wonder Grub didn't lock us out. Jake spat in the Oatmeal box as usual. That thing was swarming with magots. The King lungered a mouthful. All of us gave the wormy bastards a shower. Grub stood at the counter rolling his eyes. What's up? ya Grub, questioned Craig. Grub just snarled. Hey Grub? you need anyone to cut anything ? asked Jake. Just a few tomatoes and some bologna, replied Grub.

Why aren't you boys in church? Your lucky I'm not your Father! We sure are! yelled Carlo. Jake went to the slicing machine. Jake, teach your friend the King how to wrap the sandwiches. ordered Grub. Big mistake. His Highness was a sandwich man. He'd eat more than he'd wrap. Craig and Scott grabbed Rodent and I, to go with them to Sam's. It was bagel day. We loved them oven fresh bagels. Jake said the Jews ate 'em all the time. You weren't completely Jewish if you didn't, he'd boast. Sam's was no problem. All we did was go to the back of the bakery and wait until the drivers were almost finished loading the trucks. Then we hit.

Piling the bagels and pastry into our coats. We were stuffed. Even before getting back to Grub's. Rodent went in to get the others. His majestry made sure we'd be eating lunch that day. Since Grub insisted, we'd get paid in food. The boys always made sure each of us got our share. The problem with Grub is that he actually expected all of us to fill our bellies sharing one sandwich. Sometimes we'd clean the store for him, or stock shelves. He'd just give us a bottle of Coke to share.

Jake and Craig wouldn't allow such unfair treatment. If you work you get paid, said Jake. And Grub like anyone else is going to pay what he owes. I remember Jake working sixty hours a week and getting only ten dollars. He went bananas. We must of carried a quarter of the store that day.